<u>EDITORIAL</u>

YVANKA B. RAYNOVA (Sofia/Vienna)

On the Ethical and Cultural Perspectives of Translation

In his article "Le paradigme de la traduction" (1998), Paul Ricœur refers to the myth of Babel as the event of the original division of languages, which for him is irreversible, but does not represent a definitive impediment to understanding. He takes the fact of the dispersion and plurality of languages as an opportunity to formulate a plea for translation and linguistic hospitality as an ethical principle:

> Indeed, it seems to me that translation sets us not only intellectual work, theoretical or practical, but also an ethical problem. Bringing the reader to the author, bringing the author to the reader, at the risk of serving and of betraying two masters: this is to practise what I like to call linguistic hospitality. It is this which serves as a model for other forms of hospitality that I think resemble it: confessions, religions, are they not like languages that are foreign to one another, with their lexicon, their grammar, their rhetoric, their stylistics which we must learn in order to make our way into them? (Ricoeur 2006, 23-24)

This ethical perspective of translation as linguistic hospitality, was developed by Ricœur a few years earlier in his little-known essay "Quel éthos nouveau pour l'Europe?" (Ricœur 1992) In my opinion, this text is particularly significant because it interprets translation not just in a linguistic way but as a model of European integration. Insofar as the current issue of *Labyrinth* 2019/2 is concerned with translation as a possible bridge not only between different languages, but also between different fields of the social sciences and different cultural communities, Ricoeur's concept of a new ethos for Europe is particularly relevant.

In this short but fundamental text, Ricœur argues that the future of Europe lies in a kind of "post-national state" that has yet to be invented politically and institutionally. This, however, requires not only institutional regulation, but above all a spiritual trans-

formation of the individual and collective ethos, since political unification does not necessarily lead to community. But how, he asks, can identity and alterity, or universal rights and particular identities, be brought together into an integrative whole? Ricœur proposes three models of mediation between identity and alterity that would promote such intellectual and ethical integration: the model of translation, the model of exchange of memories, and the model of forgiveness.

In order to grasp the new "post-national" situation in a united Europe, in which identity and difference are to be thought dialectically, Ricœur presents two possible models of European integration: Translation (la traduction) and the exchange of memories. For him, translation is an appropriate model because Europe will always be multilingual. This model contains both far-reaching demands and promises that go to the heart of the ethical life of individuals and peoples. Ricœur recalls here the Humboldtian model of translation, which encourages people to raise their own language to the level of the foreign language, especially when it comes to original achievements that pose a challenge to the receiving language. It is a question, Ricœur explains, of dwelling with the other in order to bring him to oneself as an invited guest. This is precisely what is needed in the construction of the European Union:

> [...] at the institutional level, it leads us to encourage the teaching of at least two living languages throughout the whole of Europe in order to secure an audience for each of the languages which is not in a dominant position at the level of communication. But, above all, at a truly spiritual level, it leads us to extend the spirit of translation to the relationship between the cultures themselves, that is to say, to the content of meaning conveyed by the translation. It is here that there is need of translators from culture to culture, of cultural bilingualists capable of attending to this process of transference to the mental universe of the other culture, having taken account of its customs, fundamental beliefs and deepest convictions; in short, of the totality of its significant features. In this sense we can speak of a translation ethos whose goal would be to repeat at the cultural and spiritual level the gesture of linguistic hospitality mentioned above. (Ricoeur 1995, 5)

This ethical perspective of translation as linguistic hospitality was taken up by Ricœur's student Domenico Jervolino and reinterpreted as an approach to a new European politics:

> [...] I would like to point out that the idea of translation [...] can even influence politics. Let us ask ourselves what is the language of a united Europe today, in a glob-

> alized world that is shaken by wars and violence in many places. Well, I answer [...]
> that the European language is translation. In particular, in agreement with Etienne
> Balibar [...], I am convinced that Europe, matured by its centuries-long history of
> conflicts and wars, is called to become a translator and mediator of the world and to
> promote the encounter between cultures, religions and nations with an (active)
> peace policy, especially in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. (Jervolino 2014, 60)

Ricœur and Jervolino interpret translation almost exclusively in a positive light. Both see certain linguistic and semantic difficulties associated with the impossibility of a perfect, absolutely faithful translation from one language into another. While Ricœur emphasizes the ethical and spiritual significance of translation for European integration, Jervolino goes much further, attributing to it also a political influence and seeing in it the possibilities of a new, specifically European conflict resolution strategy for wars and international problems.

In contrast to these extremely positive and, to a certain extent, idealizing interpretations of translation, which ignore and conceal the real existing relations of domination in the politics of translation, I addressed in a past study the ethical and political problems of translation through a phenomenological-hermeneutic detour, which brought to light not only the positive aspects, but also the dark sides of translation as Über-Setzung "over-imposition" or "over-setting" as a term for a particular form of domination over and through language by exploiting the gift of linguistic hospitality of translation. (See Raynova 2014). Without going into the details of these negative aspects here, I would like to point out that while Ricoeur's model of translation is very appealing, it requires political will for multilingualism to be desired and promoted in an English-dominated community. But this does not seem to be the case. The European Union website states: "[...] the languages spoken in EU countries are an essential part of its cultural heritage. This is why the EU supports multilingualism in its programs and in the work of its institutions" (see European Union "Languages"), but not all documents of all European institutions are translated into all languages, not to mention the fact that important human rights agreements such as the Istanbul Convention have not been ratified by all EU states due to misunderstandings caused by poor translations.

We are seeing a similar trend in the academic community: projects that apply for funding from institutions in German-speaking countries like Austria *have to be* written in English. No choice. But let me give other examples. I have experienced two opposite trends in language use at various philosophical events, both equally problematic in my

view. On the one hand, an extreme adaptation to the English language by French speakers, who, for example, at the World Congress of Philosophy in Boston in 1998, where French was the official language, spoke exclusively in English and wanted the discussions to be conducted in English. Second, a vehement rejection of English and also of German by Spanish speakers, for example at an international conference on intercultural philosophy in Germany, where all four languages – German, Spanish, English, and French – were to be considered equal. Well, it is understandable that you want to be understood by as many people as possible and that you want your texts to be written or translated in the language in which the leading discourse on the problems you are dealing with is taking place. This is justified and reasonable. But it does not mean that, because English is the new *lingua franca*, all philosophical discourse should now take place in English. Can you really be a specialist in the philosophy of Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger without knowing a word of German and getting by with English translations in your research? And conversely, it would be naive to believe that resistance to learning or speaking English would put an end to its dominance. There are two things to note here. First, that one should master the dominant languages and discourses if one does not want to be blindly dominated by them. Second, that authentic communication, including intercultural communication, can only take place on the basis of a balance between self-respect and respect for the other person. If you give up yourself and your own language and culture, you should not expect others to be more interested in them. At the same time, you should respect the other person's language and culture in the same way that you want to be respected. Without mutual respect, there can be neither intellectual exchange nor true hospitality.

But perhaps it is precisely because the problem of translation has not received the attention it deserves that it is worth thinking, writing and campaigning more vigorously for multilingualism at different levels and in different institutions. With this issue of *Labyrinth*, we hope to make a contribution in this direction.

Prof. Dr. Yvanka B. Raynova,
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,
Institut für Axiologische Forschungen, Wien, raynova [at]iaf.ac.at

References

Jervolino, Domenico. 2014. "Übersetzung und hermeneutische Phänomenologie". Labyrinth, 16(1), 52–61. https://doi.org/10.25180/lj.v16i1.29

Raynova, Yvanka B. 2014. "Über-Setzung als diskursive Dominanz: Paul Ricœurs Übersetzungsparadigma neu gelesen." *Labyrinth: An International Journal for Philosophy, Value Theory and Sociocultural Hermeneutics*, 16(1), 62–76. https://doi.org/10.25180/lj.v16i1.30

Ricoeur, Paul. 1995. "Reflections on a new ethos for Europe." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 21(5-6), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453795021005-602

Ricoeur, Paul. 2006. *On Translation.* London and New York: Routledge.

European Union. "Languages." Online: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/languages_en